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## SELF-SACRIFICE IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS.

NOTHING is more characteristic of the teaching of Jesus than his insistence upon the duty of self-sacrifice. Again and again *THE HARD SAYINGS OF JESUS* he goes back to the same thought, that a man must lose his life to gain his life; that no man can be his disciple unless he deny himself and take up his cross and follow him; that no man can serve two masters. There were apparently no sayings of Jesus which made a similar impression upon his hearers, and there have been no sayings which have given modern Christians more difficulty. They fit well in an age of martyrs, but they seem entirely out of place in an age of conventional Christianity.

What did Jesus mean by these sayings, and what shall be the attitude of the modern church toward them? It is safe to say that Jesus did not intend them as a call to asceticism. To his enemies he appeared to enjoy life too much for a saint. In those days, as in these, it was very difficult to believe that a regard for the conventionalities of society does not in some way argue a lack of spirituality. To the excessively conscientious Pharisee, Jesus was a wine-bibber and a glutton because he came eating and drinking.

Nor is it true that Jesus could have thought that God loves a man when he is miserable better than when he is happy. It is very difficult for us to clear our minds of this unworthy conjecture. Low spirits are very apt to be interpreted as

spirituality, but Jesus never made misery the thermometer of holiness. Whatever his condition, a man was to rejoice because God was his father. Life was not to be used as a penance, but as a preparation for a blessed future through confidence in the fatherly love at the heart of things. It would be a gross misinterpretation of Jesus to say that his followers must grow less joyous, less appreciative of life's blessings, more suspicious of present happiness. Over against these words of Jesus calling for sacrifice must be placed those others which constitute the Magna Charta of optimism: Take no anxious thought for the morrow; a day's evil is all that the day should have.

If one thus clears his mind of the fanciful and over-zealous interpretation of Jesus' call to sacrifice, there at once appears the great principle upon which it is based, that one must choose the supreme good rather than a secondary good. It is not necessary to pause to discuss just what Jesus considered the supreme good to be. Clearly it is membership in the kingdom of God. It is, however, necessary to call to mind some of the things which Jesus regards as secondary goods: wealth, whether much or little, physical comfort, reputation for piety, even life itself. All these Jesus declares are to be sacrificed when they come into opposition with the supreme good.

But they are to be sacrificed because the supreme good is worth more than they. The man who sold all he had to buy the field with a treasure in it, the merchant who sold all his pearls that he might buy the one extraordinary pearl, these men did not count themselves as suffering loss in the exchange. The thing obtained was worth more than the things given. This is Jesus' very simple philosophy of sacrifice. A man surrenders an inferior good for a greater good. He gives for what he gets, but he gets something more valuable than that which he gives. He makes a good bargain. He gives, for instance, physical life; he gets eternal life.

Jesus' own life is a striking illustration of this. From the first consciousness of his great mission, he schooled himself to follow

his ideals. His experience we call the Temptation was no bit of histrionics. He actually chose the narrow path in preference to the broad way to immediate success. Life meant much to him, and he was ambitious as few men are; but again and again he pushed some lesser good aside that he might find his meat and drink in doing his Father's will. The people might wish to make him king, he might be without a place to lay his head, his friends might urge him to avoid the suffering and death he foresaw awaiting him, his own nature might cry out in Gethsemane; but his choice was steady. He would give his life for others, he would seal the new covenant with his blood, he would draw men to him by the cross. It was not that he wished martyrdom, but that he saw his mission was too great to be abandoned at any price. He, too, would not give his soul to gain the world. And therefore God hath highly exalted him and given him a name that is above all other names.

Of course, it is a matter of valuation. Some men judge wealth worth more than love. Some men judge life worth more than honor. They make their exchanges, and get what they regard to be the supreme good. But in the estimation of Jesus they are selling their own souls. Their very bargain indicates the grossness of the self that could thus estimate comparative values. His disciples were to make no such mistake, and his modern disciples must make no such mistake.

Thus, merely to go without meat on certain days, to practice petty self-denials, to do unpleasant things simply because they are unpleasant—all these things, however sincerely done, are not what Jesus means by sacrifice. He is dealing with a fundamental thing. It is the test of a man's own life. It is not that a man abandons ambition; but he grows ambitious for the best things. When a man believes the kingdom of God is supreme, he not only acts sensibly in holding to it at all costs, but he shows the sincerity and the Christ-like character of his nature. He does not seek quixotic moral adventures, but neither does he hesitate to

leave father and home and wealth, if these great goods are to be kept at the expense of his own higher self. To do this is to deny one's self, to take up one's cross and follow the Master.

The age needs this teaching. Its commercial sense will see the reasonableness of the exchange, but spiritual valuations are somewhat at a discount. We are too often ready to do the thing that needs to be done to warrant success. But why "succeed"? Perhaps "success" means the worst sort of loss. No great cause, no great institution, no great life can afford to deceive itself. It may be that a cause, an institution, a man may fail. If it be because "success" meant a sacrifice of honor or honesty or love, why should it not fail? Jesus failed, when judged by the ordinary standard. Why should not his followers? And until our faith in a loving father conquers our ambition or our terror in our own Gethsemanes, we shall never quite share in the higher and the peace of Jesus.

*THE MESSAGE  
FOR THE HOUR*